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Testimony of Ben Lamb, Conservation Director of State and National Issues
Montana Wildlife Federation
Helena, Montana

Wolf Management and Delisting Frustrations

Mr. Chairman, members of the EQC,

My name is Ben Lamb, and I am the Conservation Director for State and National Issues for the Montana Wildlife Federation. The Montana Wildlife Federation has been advocating for wildlife, wildlife habitat, hunters and anglers for 75 years. We are a membership based organization with over 7,700 members and 23 affiliate Rod and Gun Clubs from Miles City to Missoula, West Yellowstone to Libby.

I have worked on wolf policy issues in both Wyoming and Montana for approximately 8 years. In those 8 years, I have worked as a sportsmen's advocate, reaching out to all sides of the issue, and understand and agree with much of the frustration and anger surrounding the delisting process as it has unfolded. Continued litigation by certain environmental organizations has led us to the point of collapse when we look at the broader spectrum of wolf tolerance. People and organizations that once either stood silent, watching, or tacitly supported wolf reintroduction are now livid. Many feel that the covenant has been broken between the environmental community and the rest of the west with new demands on larger populations even as we see that habitat saturation leads to increased conflict and yes, declining hunter opportunity in some areas. The refrain has been sung loud and clear: Elk no longer move and act like they used too. Where once we saw abundant tracks, and had high hopes of harvest, we see wolf tracks and have to adapt to a new way of hunting. We now hunt a much wilder elk than before, especially on public lands. Wolves influence elk behavior, as does hunter pressure, loss of habitat and drought.

Hunters and Anglers have spent over a century rebuilding our game herds, providing habitat for all species of wildlife, imposing excise taxes on ourselves, managing wildlife, and generally being good stewards of our public lands, and public wildlife. We do not hate the wolf, yet we do not anthropomorphize it either. It simply is another piece of the complex matrix that makes up our landscape. As such it needs to be managed in accordance with the state laws, and the social tolerances of those people who interact with and live with wolves on a daily basis. Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks has done a good job in the last year w/ its first hunting season – while it was conservative for reasons having to do w/ litigation, it did curb wolf population growth and clipped it down to 4% instead of the 20-30% in previous years. MWF applauds FWP on their ability to manage controversial species, and provide a quality opportunity to interact with charismatic creatures such as wolves. We also encourage FWP to increase the quota on wolves so that more opportunity for hunters exists to help manage these populations and ensure the future hunting heritage for Montanans for wolves, elk, moose, and deer.

my hiking and fishing partner. Her health is my responsibility. If she is sick, I take care of her. If she shows signs of worms, I de-worm her.

The recent fervor over this issue is akin to crying fire in a movie theater, or perhaps, more appropriately, crying wolf to a weary populace in an effort to further reduce tolerance of these animals. Please read the information provided to the Council and make an informed decision on this issue. Leave the rhetoric and emotion out of this. The science is clear: yes, EG is on the landscape, but with proper hygiene and common sense, its impacts are minimal when compared to other parasites and diseases. Furthermore, it does not appear to impact deer and elk populations when they get it, unlike if CWD showed up

The Montana Wildlife Federation is firmly in support of delisting wolves. The criteria have been met in all three states. We hope that Judge Malloy will rule favorably and soon, and Montana will continue to manage wolves based on our plan, which relies on adaptive management, science and social tolerance. We have proven we can manage this critter, if simply allowed. In order to keep management with MT and not by the federal government, we must hold the line, and keep from changing the laws or wolf management approach. . We must continue to work in good faith with all stakeholders, even the ones that try to keep us from managing our own wildlife. We must move forward together, or we will all fail – hunters, outdoor enthusiasts, and livestock producers..

Thank you for the opportunity to comment, we appreciate your service to the people, and the wildlife of Montana.

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